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SAFE H2OME PROGRAM

FACT SHEET #3 HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE

Why Should I Be Concerned?

Look in your garage, your basement, or under your kitchen sink. Many products found in households may pose a threat to your family's health. These products can also contaminate ground and surface water if improperly handled. Harmful products include drain cleaners, oven cleaners, art supplies, lead-based paint, paint remover, solvents, motor oil, antifreeze and pesticides.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to help you identify and properly dispose of hazardous wastes in your home. It will also help you identify safe alternatives to many hazardous products used in and around homes.

What Makes a Substance Hazardous?

A substance is considered hazardous if it is flammable, corrosive, toxic or can explode. If hazardous substances are poured into a sewer or septic system they can disrupt the function of the treatment plant or septic system. Disposed of in the trash, they can harm waste handlers or be spilled. And when they reach a landfill, they can contaminate ground water. In a residential fire, stored chemicals could cause explosions or release toxic fumes that could injure occupants and firefighters.

Look at the labels of the products in your home. Ingredients such as lye, petroleum distillates, phenols and trichlorobenzene indicate that the products pose a threat to your health and the environment.

Did you know products with hazardous ingredients must bear a label showing the toxicity of the product? Warning labels on containers can give you information on the threats posed by the contents. The levels of hazard are indicated by the terms DANGER-POISON, WARNING, and CAUTION. The chart on the next page shows the threats associated with products bearing these labels.

A joint water quality project from:

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- **Danger - Poison:** Substances that are extremely flammable, toxic, or corrosive
- **Warning:** Moderately toxic substances
- **Caution:** Slightly toxic substances

Because you want to protect your family's health and reduce threats to ground water, **read labels before you make a purchase, and purchase the least toxic chemical that can do the job.**

Here are some examples of common household products and the specific hazardous substances they contain.

- **Oven cleaners** contain lye, naphtha, petroleum distillates and methylene chloride. These ingredients can cause respiratory distress, or burn the skin, and can affect the liver and kidneys. *Some of these chemicals can accumulate in sediments, plants and animals.*
- **Paint thinners** contain toluene, acetone, napthalene, and other ingredients. These can cause dizziness, eye and throat irritation, and lung and kidney damage. These chemicals accumulate in the environment and harm aquatic life.
- **Toilet bowl cleaners** contain sodium hydroxide, chlorinated phenols and complex phosphates. These chemicals are toxic and corrosive. Long-term exposure causes headaches, and liver and kidney damage. Some of these chemicals build up in fatty tissues of wildlife and humans. Products with blue dye contain chromium, which is toxic.

Disposal of Household Hazardous Wastes

The disposal of household hazardous wastes is a difficult problem; wastes should not be poured on the ground, into a sewer or septic system or sent to a town landfill. In fact, the only safe way to dispose of many substances is to turn them in on household hazardous waste collection days. Unfortunately, few towns in Maine hold collection days because of the expense. Talk to your town officials and state legislators about the need for household hazardous waste collection programs. Providing a safe method of disposal protects homeowners and the environment.

What can you do with your hazardous wastes until proper disposal can be arranged? Depending upon the substance, you may have a few options.
First, try to prevent a disposal problem from ever occurring. Before you buy any product

with hazardous ingredients, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I really need this product? For example, is a special toilet bowl cleaner really necessary?
- Is there a less toxic product I could use?
- How much do I need? Is this just enough to do the job, or will I have leftover product?

Recycling

- Motor oil: Many towns and some automobile repair shops will take used motor oil to burn in special heaters or to send in for recycling.
- Antifreeze: Some towns recycle antifreeze. Also, you can reuse antifreeze; strain it through a pair of nylons and mix with fresh antifreeze. DO NOT leave outside to evaporate. Antifreeze tastes sweet to children and animals but is HIGHLY TOXIC! Disposal in a septic system or sewer system may kill the bacteria that make these systems function properly.
- Old gasoline: Mix one part old gas with five parts fresh gas and use normally.
- All other materials: If the substance has not become unusable, share it with friends or family.

Disposal

- Leftover paint: Open the paint can and allow the paint to evaporate in a well-ventilated area away from children. The can may then be disposed of in a landfill.

Examples of Less Toxic Alternatives for Some Household Products

Ant Control Products	Pour a line of cream of tartar, red chili powder, paprika, or dried peppermint leaves at point of entry.
Flea Control Products	Give pets nutritional yeast, garlic tablets, or vitamin B as preventatives; prepare herbal baths with fennel, rue or rosemary to repel fleas.
Deodorizers	Use an open box of baking soda in your refrigerator or closets; for rooms, simmer cinnamon and cloves in water or place potpourri (herbs or dried flowers treated with scented oils) in open dishes.
Furniture/Wood Polish	Rub furniture with 1 tablespoon of lemon oil mixed in one pint of mineral oil.
Drain Cleaners	Use a plunger, then add 1/4 cup baking soda followed by 1/2 cup vinegar; let sit for 15 minutes then rinse with 2 quarts of boiling water.
Glass Cleaners	Use 2 tablespoons of vinegar in 1 quart of water.
Carpet Spot Cleaner	Apply club soda immediately, blot dry, then repeat. Or sprinkle with cornmeal and cornstarch and vacuum after 30 minutes.
Toilet Bowl Cleaner	Use baking soda and vinegar or a non-chlorinated scouring powder.
Chlorine Bleach	Use oxygen bleaches or borax.

Household Hazardous Waste Worksheet

Filling out this worksheet will help you rate the threat that hazardous household materials pose to your drinking water. A low risk means that you are handling hazardous materials safely. A high risk indicates that you should change how you manage hazardous substances to protect ground water and your family's health.

Choose the answer that best describes your situation.

Home Activities	High Risk (4)	Moderate-High Risk (3)	Low-Moderate Risk (2)	Low Risk (1)	Your Rank
Materials Used	Many toxic products used (pesticides, paint thinners, polishes, spot removers), many toxic materials stored, toxic materials purchased in large quantities to save money	Many toxic materials used in home, products stored in unlabeled containers	Few toxic products used in the home, cleaners, paints, thinners, and pesticides purchased only as needed	Very few toxic products in the home, non-toxic products used when possible	
Material Disposal	Dumped in sewer, septic system, storm drain, or on the ground	Put in containers for landfilling or incineration	Used up, given away, or safely stored	Used up, given away, or recycled. Few, if any, toxic products purchased	
Material Storage	Stored in easily accessible area, labels missing, used oil or anti-freeze in open containers	Stored indoors out of reach of children and pets, labels tattered	Stored in locked cabinet in spill-proof containers, original labels intact	None stored	

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